



## COURTESY

**Directive: 12 – 104**

Date of Issue: July 2013    Amends/Cancel: G.O. 09-03

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### I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Directive is to provide guidelines in specific areas of courtesy and the expected behavior of all Department of General Services Maryland Capitol Police (DGS-MCP) employees.

### II. POLICY

All members of DGS-MCP will familiarize themselves with the following guidelines regarding courtesy and govern their actions accordingly.

### III. BACKGROUND

Professionalism and courtesy must be practiced by all DGS-MCP employees in order to earn the respect and support of the citizens in our community. Courtesy encourages cooperation and wins respect; discourtesy breeds obstruction and contempt. While our employees often encounter situations that make formal courtesies impractical, the nature of the work is never an excuse for discourtesy.

The following guidelines address specific areas of courtesy and the expected behavior of all DGS-MCP employees.

### IV. GUIDELINES

- A. INTRODUCTIONS.** When practical, all members are expected to identify themselves by title and name at the beginning of any contact with a citizen. Greetings such as “good morning” or “good afternoon” should be included when appropriate. Remember that greetings are the first and best opportunity to set the tone of any encounter. The more cordial (or at least neutral) an encounter can be kept; the more the participants can concentrate on their business at hand.
- B. TONE OF VOICE.** Speech is the primary communication tool used by department members. When used to request or give information, it is also the tool most frequently used to control situations. While conscious thought is usually given to the content of speech, the tone of voice is often left to chance. Members should always be aware of voice tone and use it to their advantage. The voice should not portray anger, contempt, sarcasm, or other tones that are likely to provoke opposition.
- C. VOICE VOLUME.** Clearly there are times when members must raise their voices or issue an unmistakably audible command or be heard over background noise, but care should be taken to avoid raising voice volume out of emotion or merely because another party has raised their voice. Shouting matches are rarely productive and often give the impression that the department member

is losing control of the situation. Often the effective response to a loud voice is a quiet reply. It demonstrates that the member is not losing his composure and may encourage the other party to lower their own voice. It also preserves a clear difference between the behavior of the department member and the person with whom they are dealing.

- D. FORMS OF ADDRESS.** Members should not address citizens by first names unless the circumstances clearly make it appropriate. Nicknames and diminutives (“Skippy,” “Pops,” “Junior,” etc.) are never appropriate. The use of honorifics, such as “Mister” or “Miss,” is encouraged whenever a person is addressed by his or her last name. If the last name is not known, “sir,” “ma’am,” etc.
- E. BODY LANGUAGE.** While members must often assume stances that are required to preserve safety during encounters with the public, care must be taken to avoid mannerisms which needlessly provoke negative reactions from citizens. Resting a hand on the butt of a holstered weapon or gesturing with an asp baton or flashlight are examples of such behavior. Facial expression also has a great influence on the tone of any exchange. Members are urged to avoid the display of negative emotions as much as possible.
- This does not mean that members must adopt a “wooden” face, devoid of all expression. The display of friendly, or at least neutral, expressions is encouraged as an effective way to gain the cooperation of the public.
- F. CROWDING.** Most persons in our society are threatened or offended by intrusion into their personal space – the area immediately around their bodies – unless they have consented to the intrusion. Most police and security officers understand that this is both an area of danger and a powerful tool that can be used to influence behavior. Members must restrict this practice to situations that clearly call for such intrusions: physical arrest, separating opponents, weapons frisk, seizing evidence, controlling a potential disturbance, etc. It should only be done on purpose and for a specific, legitimate reason – not unconsciously or for merely personal reasons.
- G. PERSONAL OPINIONS.** A frequent error committed by both police and security is the expression of inappropriate personal opinions. While opinions are important in exercising discretion, offering advice to the public, selecting options and other areas of judgment, members should never publicly express their personal opinions on the importance of a complaint. It is particularly important to guard against the expression of such opinions through facial expression, tone of voice, body language or other conduct.
- H. PROFANITY.** The use of profanity is never appropriate.
- I. DEMEANING REMARKS.** Any remark or form of address that ridicules a citizen, expresses contempt or is calculated to provoke anger is never appropriate.
- J. PROVOCATION BY CITIZENS.** Few vocations require more self-control than law enforcement and security. It is an absolute essential trait for all department members. Anyone not able to develop and practice self-control should find another line of work as soon as possible for his/her own good, the good of the department, and the good of the community.

Citizens often direct anger and frustration against those in a position of authority. There is a constant temptation to reply. Do not give in to it. There is nothing to gain from replying to

insults, and much to lose if the member engages in offensive behavior or speech. It is important to preserve a clear distinction between the proper behavior of police/security and the offensive behavior of citizens.

The best way to handle an insult is to ignore it. Focus your own behavior on completing the business at hand. If you are receiving information that is being given in an insulting manner, concentrate on collecting the information and ignore the manner as much as possible. If a legitimate request or question is asked in an insulting manner, react only to the legitimate content of the request and ignore the insult. Remember: We have no obligation to correct behavior that is merely obnoxious. It is futile even to try.

There will be times when insulting behavior by a citizen may incite public disturbance or become a challenge to the authority of an officer. Calm and careful warnings are then appropriate, so that the citizen will have opportunity to moderate the behavior before the situation escalates to a possible arrest. This is an important test of an officer's ability to control a situation or later become an issue in court or in other proceedings.

It is true that people sometimes confuse an explanation with an argument. But it is also true that in many cases the members simply did not want to take the time to listen, or felt that listening would be interpreted as weakness or lack of resolve. While the circumstances may not always permit the police to listen at great length, time invested in listening is generally more productive than time spent talking. When practical, members should give citizens an opportunity to express their views and acknowledge that they have been heard.

*REMEMBER.* It is possible to listen to acknowledge what is said without approving the content or excusing behavior being discussed.

When people have something to say, they will be heard. If you don't take the time to listen, they will find someone else who does.

**K. EXPLAINING WHAT WE DO.** The most frequently overlooked courtesy is the simple act of explaining what we are doing. We tend to forget that citizens may be unfamiliar with laws, policy and procedures within the state system. Just think how hard it is for us to keep up with all the changes in our work, and we can imagine how confused the average citizen must be when dealing with the system we represent. When people are left ignorant of the reason for our actions, they may assume we have acted out of ignorance, arrogance or caprice. This almost always provokes suspicion, anger or reduced willingness to cooperate.

Sometimes we are not free to explain our actions. To do so might violate a confidence, interfere with a tactical situation or take more time than we can afford. In most cases, however, explanations are not only possible, they are preferred. While a traffic violator is receiving a citation, he should not be lectured; the officer can explain the violation if the citizen is at all receptive. A citizen who requests an officer to act contrary to the law or policy should not merely be refused; the officer should attempt to explain the law or policy. When a person is subjected to a delay, field interrogation or warrant check, the member should attempt to explain the law or policy.

*REMEMBER.* It is easier and more effective for you to explain your actions to a citizen than it is for a superior to try to explain them on your behalf.

**L. LISTENING.** The complaint most frequently received by a department is that a member showed no consideration for the citizen's feelings. Such complaints often describe the member's actions as "cold," "hard," "mean," "arrogant," "uncaring," "obnoxious," "treated me like a criminal," "refused to listen to me," or "cut me off when I tried to explain." These comments come from victims and violators alike. When examined, they all have one thing in common: the citizen felt that the member would not even pay him the courtesy of listening to an explanation.

Officers are human too. How we treat co-workers, subordinates or superiors also effects, our relationship with others. Ask yourself: Do I raise my voice unnecessarily? Do I crowd people or "invade their space?" Do I practice the principles of Military Courtesy? Do I demean the people I work with? Do I take time to explain myself? Do I listen?

## **M. CONCLUSION**

1. None of the preceding guidelines means that department members must sacrifice safety or become the passive recipients of endless abuse. Members will occasionally have to speak sternly to citizens in order to discharge their duties. Some member of the public will become unruly or complain, regardless of the consideration or restraint shown by the department member. However, department members are expected to use the most courteous approach that the citizen and the circumstances will allow.

*Simply put: The best way to avoid trouble is to speak to citizens as you would speak to family members or how you would want to be spoken to.*

2. It is easy to relegate professionalism to our on-duty activity. The fact of the matter is the principles presented in the proceeding article have application in our personal lives as well. How we interact with our family, neighbors and friends has a direct impact on how we treat fellow members, complainants, victims, witnesses, suspects and arrestees.
3. Law enforcement and security can be thought of as a continuing series of confrontations; with the supervisor, with the dispatcher, with the next caller for service. This perception of the job is not only inaccurate; it's unhealthy for the member. Some people are and will be difficult to deal with no matter how professionally they are treated. But the vast majority of people, by their human nature, respond to firm authority, fairly applied and professionally delivered.
4. More often, insulting behavior by a citizen will make our job more difficult to complete, but will not create a hazard to the employee. While handling a call for service, making an arrest, investigating a complaint etc., we must never allow ourselves to be diverted from duty by obnoxious behavior. At such times, the members may have to merely endure, if the citizen will not moderate their behavior upon request.
5. This does not mean that members must always accept every abuse short of an offense that calls for an arrest. If the work at hand is something that clearly allows for a delay, the members may elect to break contact with the offending citizens if they refuse to moderate their behavior. Such actions must be clearly explained to the citizen, as should the means to remedy it.